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ABSTRACT

This report presents data on the Ohio Department of Education's Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring program, examining where students who receive school vouchers attended school before entering the program. Overall, 33 percent of these students previously attended private schools, and 21 percent previously attended Cleveland public schools. The rest enrolled as kindergartners or came from elsewhere. There were 3,741 students eligible for the vouchers, 1,234 of whom had previously attended private schools, 801 of whom had attended Cleveland public schools, and 1,706 of whom entered in kindergarten or came from elsewhere. Of the 1,706 students, at least 216 had attended preschool at private schools now participating in the voucher program, 758 were entering kindergarten, about 713 went to other preschools or day care programs, 15 had attended public schools or public preschools in another city, and 4 were home schooled. Parents were more likely to use vouchers when their children were first entering school. About 39 percent of students receiving aid came from private schools. The voucher program, which began in 1996-97, provides up to $2,250 per student to attend one of 51 private schools. Participants are selected by lottery. Ohio spent nearly $7.7 million on the program on the year ending June 30. (SM)

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POLICY MATTERS OHIO

CLEVELAND SCHOOL VOUCHERS: WHERE THE STUDENTS COME FROM

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CLEVELAND SCHOOL VOUCHERS: WHERE THE STUDENTS COME FROM

Cleveland's school voucher program has been the focus of considerable attention and now faces a possible test before the United States Supreme Court. Policy Matters Ohio, a nonprofit research organization in Cleveland, analyzed data from the Ohio Department of Education's Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program to answer the question: Where did students getting vouchers go to school before they got into the program?

Policy Matters found that close to 33 percent of the students receiving aid through the Cleveland voucher program previously had been attending private schools, while only 21 percent had gone to public schools in Cleveland. The remaining 46 percent enrolled as kindergarteners or came from elsewhere.

The numbers suggest that vouchers in Cleveland are serving more as a subsidy for students already attending private schools than as an "escape hatch" for students eager to leave the public schools, as The Wall Street Journal suggested in a June editorial.[1]

As of July 16, according to data supplied by the program, there were 3,741 students who were eligible for the vouchers. These students were those who participated in the 2000-2001 school year, minus a small number who withdrew from the program. Of the 3,741:

1,234 had previously attended private schools
801 had gone to Cleveland public schools (the Cleveland Municipal School District)
1,706 entered the program in kindergarten, or came from elsewhere.

Data available from the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program are not precise enough to allow a comprehensive, accurate portrayal of where every participant in the voucher program had been prior to the program.

However, of the 1,706 who mostly entered in kindergarten,
At least 216 had gone to preschool at private schools now participating in the voucher program;
758 were entering kindergarten, according to the voucher office, but data didn't indicate if they had been in a preschool;
Up to 713 went to other preschools or day care programs;
15 had attended public school or public preschool in another city, and
4 were listed as home schooled.

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[1] The Wall Street Journal, "Cleveland Chooses," June 1, 2001

Largest number entered in kindergarten

The largest number of the total 3,741 students in the program entered it in kindergarten, so they had not previously been enrolled in school. Rather than transfer their children from an existing school, parents were more likely to use vouchers when their children were first entering school. Without conducting surveys, it's difficult to know where these parents would have sent their children to school without the voucher program.

Of the 1,706 students, at least 216, or 6 percent of the total receiving vouchers, had previously been going to preschool at private schools that are now participating in the voucher program. Data made available to Policy Matters don't indicate whether these pupils are now attending the same school or another one participating in the voucher program. However, together with the 1,234 voucher students who came from private schools, it suggests that at least 39 percent of the students receiving aid came from a private school background.

That's nearly twice the proportion of pupils that came from CMSD schools. Data available from the voucher office listed 801 who had previously attended CMSD schools (A small number of these pupils could have attended preschool at CMSD schools, but the voucher office data did not distinguish such students). A few others -- 15 or so -- had attended public school or public preschool outside of Cleveland before entering the program.

Program history

The voucher program began during the 1996-97 school year. It provides up to $2,250 per student to attend one of 51 private schools. Participants are selected by lottery, and those who qualify remain eligible, as long as they continue to meet the program's requirements.

At the time the Ohio General Assembly approved the voucher plan in 1995, it limited the number of private-school students who could participate in the voucher program to half of the total.[2] John M. Goff, then state superintendent of public instruction, further established a guideline under which 25 percent came from private schools in each year's lottery for the vouchers. That way, three-quarters of the money would go to children who hadn't already opted out of the public schools.[3] Those voucher recipients who already attended private schools were more likely to stay in them, education department officials believed, and so the 25 percent guideline also would keep their proportion of the total below the law's limit.

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[2] Ohio Revised Code, Section 3313.975(B)

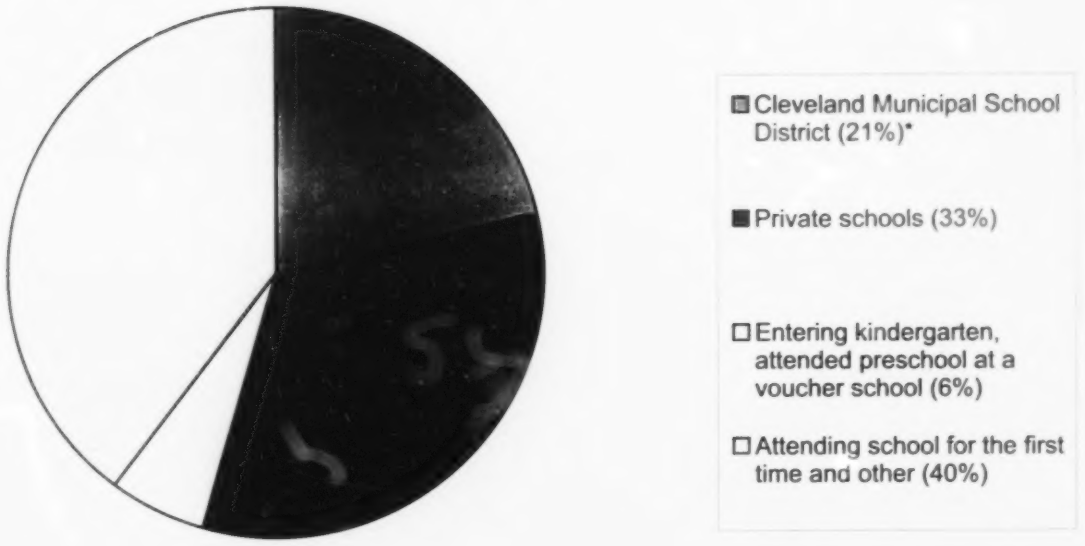
[3] Conversations with John M. Goff, August 24, 2001 and Francis Rogers, ODE assistant director for policy research, August 29, 2001

That 25 percent guideline was eliminated when the guidelines for the program were rewritten a couple of years ago, but the proportion remains within the law.[4]

The state spent a total of nearly $7.7 million on the program in the year that ended June 30 (that included almost $6 million in vouchers, as well as $416,000 for another, separate tutoring program).

[4] Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program, Program Administration and Procedures Manual

Where voucher students had been before


Cleveland Municipal School District (21%)*
Private schools (33%)
Entering kindergarten, attended preschool at a voucher school (6%)
Attending school for the first time and other (40%)

*-- May include some pupils who went to preschool at CMSD; excludes 15 who came from public schools outside Cleveland

Source: Policy Matters Ohio analysis of Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program data

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